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9TH CONGRESS

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# Designing a different prison

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Situational Architecture for inhabited spaces of detention

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## Synopsis

In recent years, Architecture has returned to take an interest in penitentiary structures, rediscovering its civil and educational role.

Prisons represent a device of forced detention, preventing prisoners to move away freely from the spaces of imprisonment. Detention models develop from a control idea through which the State exercises its power. Space is the manifestation of that power. As these buildings serve as control, society "excludes" such infrastructures from inhabited centers, stripping them of their function of public service. Architecture can provide a different view of detention, suggesting a new way of living such spaces and offering ideas for legislative instruments to the State. Similarly, designers should communicate with the users of prisons in order to better their lives, playing a pedagogical role towards the inmates.

The paper summarizes these issues, starting from the researches carried out by the Department of Architecture of the University of Naples "Federico II". The aim of this study is to define a method to design an inclusive prison, by using an exemplary project: the new prison for Nola, Italy. In this case, attention shifts from the typological definition of space to the action each person performs within it. The space is shaped from the measure of the gestures of man, determining a prison able to build positive relationships within people and its surroundings, serving society and the context in which it is located.

**Key words:** Prison, society, city, inhabit, situation.



## 1. Introduction

The exception to a rule recognized by society, could be identified as anything that undermines its stability. Spatial organisms control “exceptional” phenomena. Each State institution guarantees the order responding to the need for security in many different ways. Prisons ensure security coercively.

Between 2015 and 2016 Italy took a step forward with the *Stati Generali dell'Esecuzione Penale*, summoned by the Ministry of Justice. Several disciplines have offered a contribution to the issue of detention. Architecture was the main character of table 1. *"The table aims to develop new configurations of the penalty spaces for a model of detention based on the life in common areas and the proper performance of treatment activities"*<sup>1</sup>. The result of this effort is a list of operational proposals for design, including the responsibility of prisoners, the arrangement of spaces through a shared design between designers and prisoners and the need to relate the prison with its context, in order to define parameters to improve prisoners' life.

## 2. Prison and city

Thanks to the analysis of existing prisons it is possible to outline three types of actions with which the city and the society relate to the exception: excluding, isolating and disconnecting.

To exclude (Fig. 1, *“Due Palazzi” prison, Padua*): the city rejects, in a border outside it, anything that does not respond to the rule, placing a spatial distance between the society and its exception.

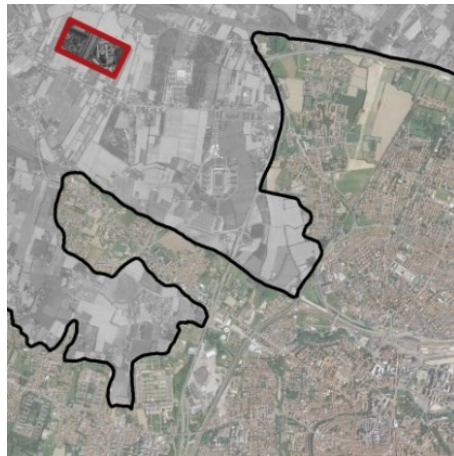


Figure 1.

To isolate (Fig. 2, *“San Vittore” prison, Milan*): the exception is isolated on a boundary inside the city. The portion of isolated space no longer serves the city; it is sacrificed in the name of control.

<sup>1</sup> Ministero della Giustizia, Stati Generali, Tavolo 1 [online], 2016.  
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Figure 2.

To disconnect (*Fig. 3, prison in Nisida, Naples*): it refers to the physical distance that is determined between different control devices and society. Governing diversity is possible by relegating exceptions through a system of natural boundaries.

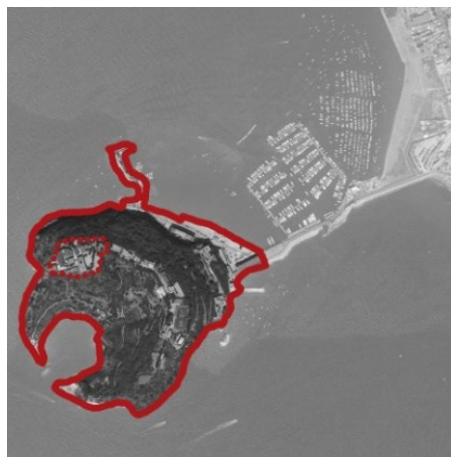


Figure 3.

The action identified by the Stati Generali is to "include". Man and his needs ought matter in the design of a spatial control device. Prison is no longer hidden, isolated or excluded and the community is called to take an interest in the world of detention. The purpose is to guarantee safety by empowering and rehabilitating the prisoners.

### 3. For a situational Architecture

*"Prison should be the place of opportunity and not of deprivation, starting from the consideration that the lack of personal freedom is itself the punishment"*<sup>2</sup>. This personal freedom should be limited exclusively by the outer enclosure of the penitentiary, *showing that to inhabit can still be considered an act of freedom*<sup>3</sup>. The Department of Architecture of the University of Naples "Federico II" has dealt with

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<sup>2</sup> Giardiello Paolo in: Santangelo, Marella, 2017. In Prigione. Siracusa: LetteraVentiude.p.151.

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, p.31.

penitentiaries in recent years through shared design actions<sup>4</sup> between prisoners and architecture students. The aim is to contribute to the re-education of prisoners from the identification of actions he performs daily. A further freedom is recognized, given by the possibility of choosing the actions to carry out within a given perimeter. We talk about situational design, based on the idea of placing an action in a site with specific characteristics to transform it into a place (Fig. 4-5, situational and shared design for Poggioreale). Even in prison *"the physical prerogatives of space configure the ideal circumstances for the action itself"*<sup>5</sup>.

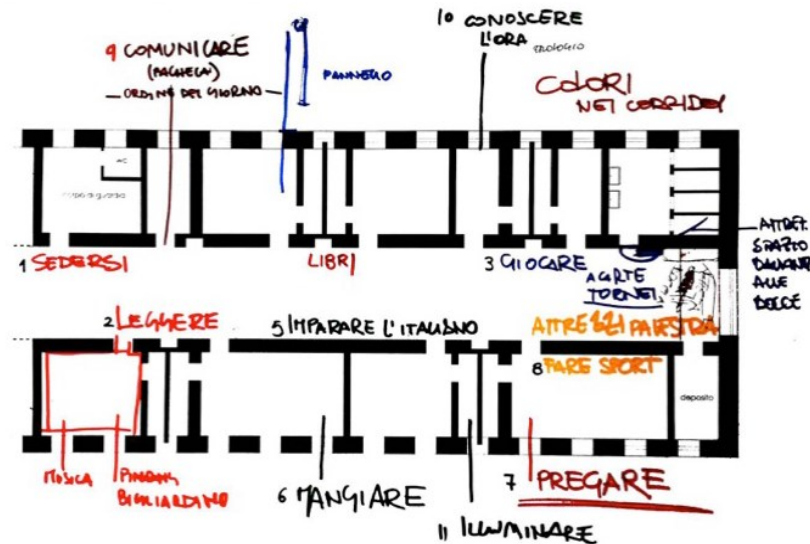


Figure 4.



Figure 5.

<sup>4</sup> Design workshops in prison promoted by prof. Marella Santangelo. 2015-2016: Vivere dentro. Riqualfying project of corridors and a project for the courtyards (Casa circondariale Poggioreale, Napoli). 2016: Abitare ristretti. Project for workspaces (Biennale di Venezia e Casa di reclusione Due Palazzi, Padova). 2017: FiveDots. Project for the corridor and the courtyard (Istituto penale per minorenni, Treviso).

<sup>5</sup> Farris, Amanzio, 2012. Situate l'azione. Firenze: AlineaEditrice. p.33

#### 4. The project for Nola prison

Through a conscious design it is possible to build an enriched environment<sup>6</sup> that offers dignity as well as new experiences to prisoners. This design process is carried out in the project for a new prison in Nola<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 6, master plan), in which the space is conformed starting from the gestures of individuals rather than a performance based building design.



Figure 6.

The project is intended as a narrative device of the stories told by people known in prison during the design workshops: the need to eat together, to prepare their own meal, to have a space to store their own things, to be able to have a shower without being observed, to write letters, to hang the photo of their families. These stories allow architects to design spaces on a human scale, starting from the cell, which cannot be considered a simple bedroom. Resting is just one of the actions which take place in this space. *The bed itself defines the area intended for the most intimate actions. Its equipment is built starting from a casier*<sup>8</sup>. A flap door lets the prisoner write or play cards lying in bed; the presence of drawers allows him to store clothes; next to the cushion, an open compartment provides support and lightening in the evening (Fig. 7, the bed).

<sup>6</sup> Rosenzweig, Mark, 1987. Enriched and Impoverished Environments. New York: Springer-Verlag.

<sup>7</sup> Casalbordino, Francesco, A.A.2016/17. Principi spaziali per un carcere inclusivo. Tesi di Laurea in Composizione Architettonica e Urbana. Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II", DiARC.

<sup>8</sup> The equipment presented by Le Corbusier in 1929.

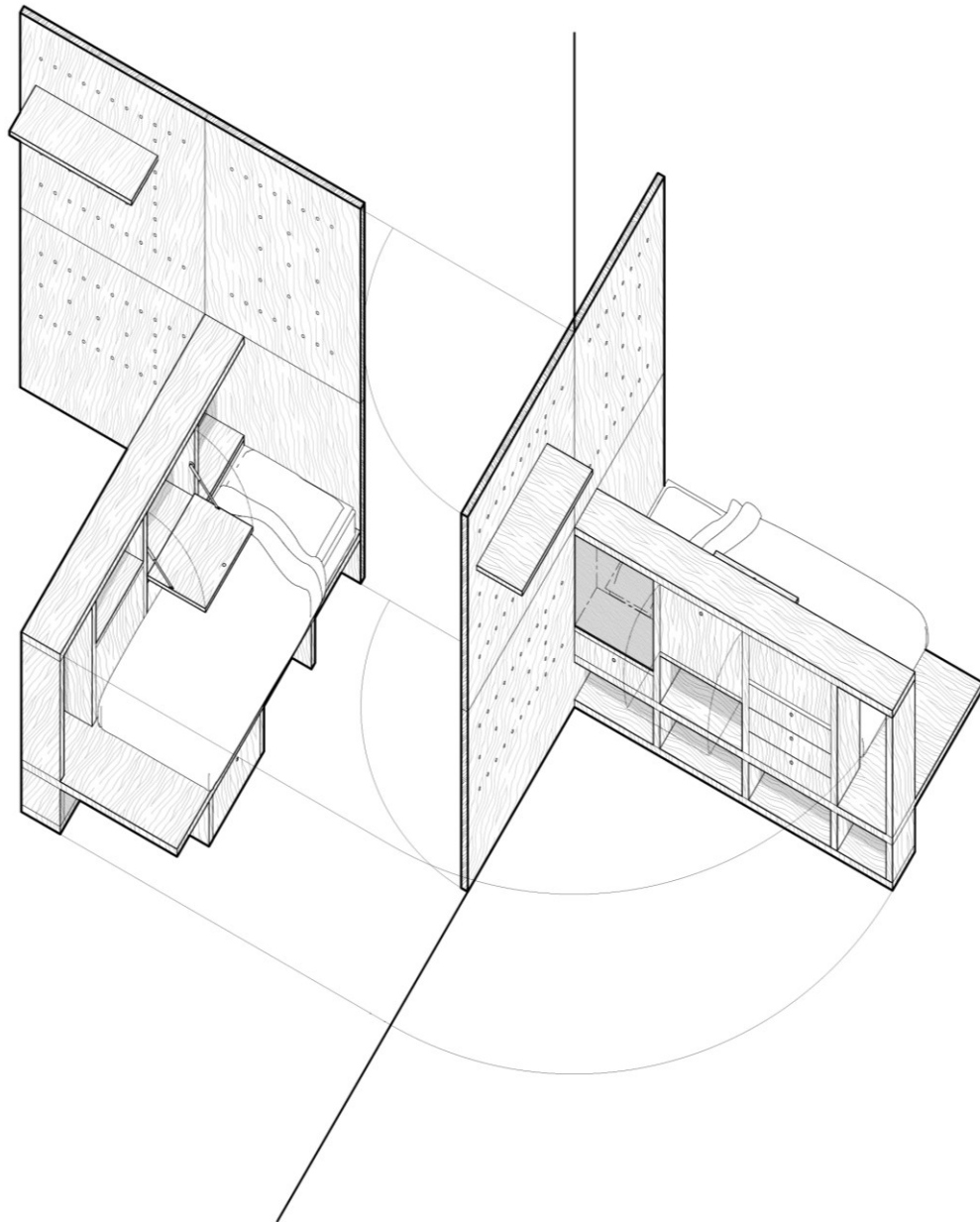


Figure 7.

The cell hosts part of the collective life. The possibility of being together must be guaranteed or suggested by space. Therefore, the different combinations of equipment always leave the necessary space for the temporary opening of a table around which to gather with the companions. An equipped wall, around which all the actions are carried out, organizes the cell. The entire space is projected outwards through a fixed window on the landscape that allows you to orient yourself in time and context (Fig. 8-9, the cell unit).



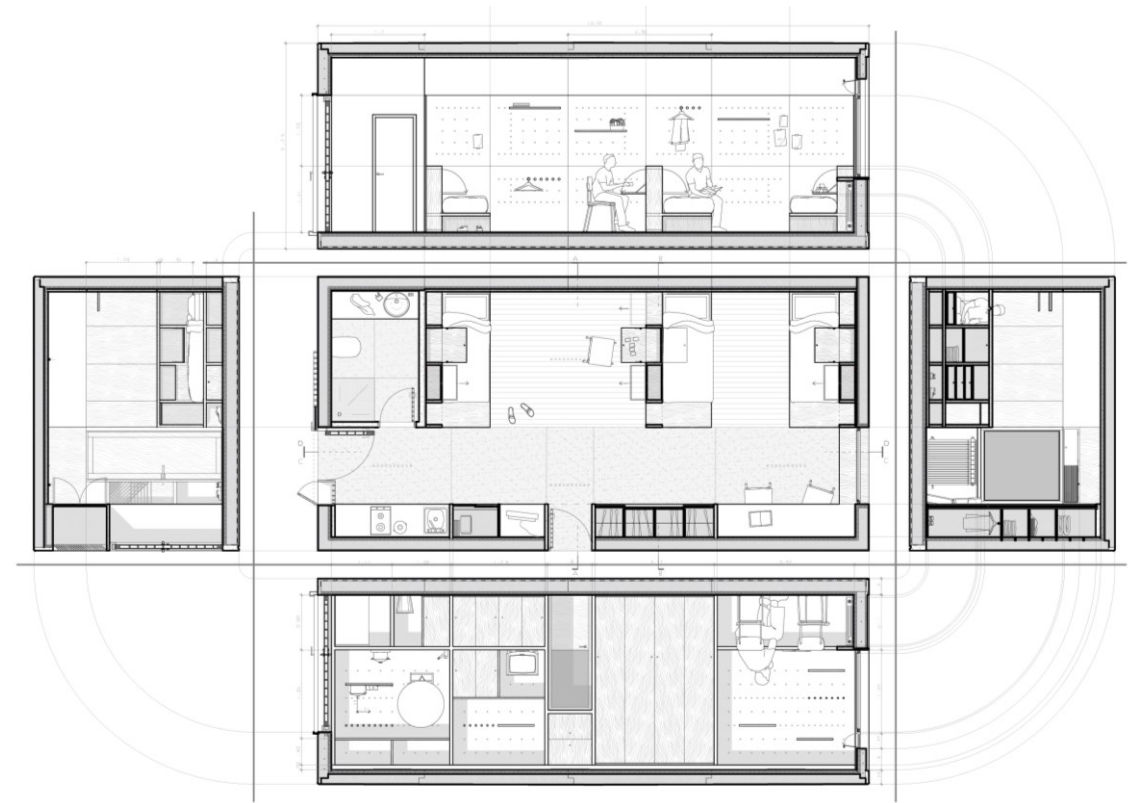


Figure 8.

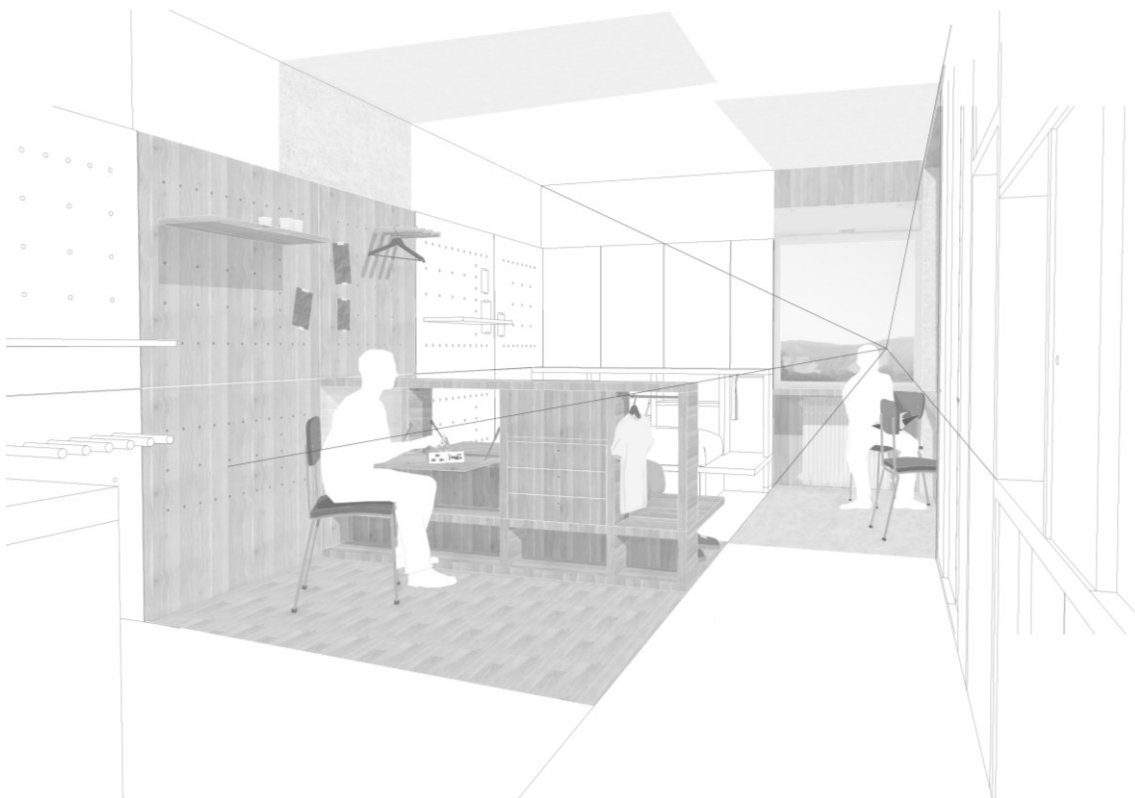


Figure 9.

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## Biography

**Francesco Casalbordino.** Master's degree in Architecture at Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II" in 2018 with a thesis in Architectural and Interior Design entitled "Principi spaziali per un carcere inclusivo. Il progetto del nuovo carcere di Nola." From 2017, assisting the teaching and research activity of prof. arch. Marella Santangelo in the courses of Architectural Design at Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II". His research about detention issues has been carried out since 2015 with several participations in shared design workshops with prisoners.